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ABSTRACT

This document is an abstract of a joint meeting between National Institute of Education (NIE) and National Education Association (NEA) staff. The document is organized around four ideas discussed at the meeting. The first is the political constituency for NIE; that is, the program of NIE must be made relevant and visible to educational practitioners. The second is the idea of the teacher craftsman: as teachers know more about teaching than anyone else, there should be an organized effort to identify "the great craftsman teacher" and devise mechanisms to get at and replicate this craftsmanship. It is added that teacher involvement would be more readily achieved if it were made a part of U.S. Office of Education guidelines. The third idea presented, teacher participation in NIE, is based on the belief that teachers represent a great pool of expertise. It is proposed that teachers recognized by their peers be considered for membership on a "council of instruction." Finally, possible NIE-NEA cooperation is discussed. Two activities are particularly considered: a) creating a new position of "instructional ombudsman"--a teacher given administrative preparation by both NEA and NIE to move back into a school district, preferably the one from which he or she came--and b) providing teachers with information on what kinds of resources are available to accomplish a particular type of learning. (JA)

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June 13, 1972

Dr. Harry Silberman
National Institute for Education
Planning Unit
425 13th Street, N.W. Suite 1144
Washington, D.C. 20004

Dear Harry:

Enclosed is a tightly written abstract from some seven tapes concerning N.I.E. This paper is from the meeting held with your staff and some NEA representatives in November.

I'm sorry it is so late, but I am sure you can appreciate my problem.

As agreed this is not a position paper or policy position of NEA but the results of our discussion. The total transcript is available if you desire a copy.

Best Wishes,

Jim

Jim Becker, Director
Instruction and Professional Development

JWB:cw

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Draft of Proposed Memo to OE

In an effort to summarize our full-day meeting of last November from the point of view of the united teaching profession, we shall first deal with the major concepts--a political constituency for NIE, the teacher-craftsman idea, and teacher participation in NIE. We will then be more specific in detailing from our discussion some areas where NIE and NEA may have mutual interest and where they may be able to work cooperatively from the outset.

A Constituency for NIE

Early in our discussion, and repeatedly throughout the day, the point was made that most of the stuff we call research in education is in fact not research at all. And most of this enormous "OE research output" over the last decade has lain fallow. Three reasons were put forward by those of us around the table to explain this situation:

First, the "research" is often done by "elitist groups," the psychologists, the sociologist, the anthropologist--people who are removed from the realities of the schools and who tend to be idiosyncratic in their perceptions, their research, and their writing. Secondly, when and if bits and pieces of this research

output are applied to improve practice in the real day-to-day world of schools and teachers, it is superimposed and the results speak for themselves. Thirdly, the dead horses of communication and dissemination were evoked. But here there seemed to be agreement that the first two points are part and parcel of this one, with one important new difference. Today we have entered a new age as far as teachers are concerned. They have new-found power, a much stronger voice, and an emerging commitment to improve their own performance.

If NIE is to flourish and attain a degree of permanence within the bureaucracy where it is being spawned, it must have a strong, organized constituency. The unhappy history of OE research efforts is an eloquent testimonial to this fact. The key to building this necessary, broad-based support for NIE was touched on at the start of our meeting when it was said that "one of the things we must consider in any type of research and development is the role of the person who is in direct contact with students each day." To put it mildly, it has been difficult for the three-million rank-and-file teachers of America to get very excited or militant about federal research efforts in education to date.

The politics of federal research must be carefully examined as NIE is planned, and it was suggested at the meeting that some attention be given to the original intent of Congress in this area when OE was established. As we urged you in November,

somehow the program of NIE must be made relevant and visible to the educational practitioner. As one of our officials put it: "One thing that comes through loud and clear from teachers all over this nation is that when change comes, whatever it is, teachers as teachers, as practicing professionals in the school, must be identified with it. They are now at the point where they know they are professionals, and they want the federal government to know they have a contribution to make in the area of instruction. And they certainly want their school boards to know it. What I am asking for is some kind of an approach that will identify the educators in this nation as the real 'pros' and that will give a new slant to NIE and certainly a broad field for participation by the teaching profession."

The Teacher-Craftsman Idea

You will recall that several times during our meeting the concept of "teacher-as-craftsman" was mentioned, and there was talk about "inverting the model" in an effort to bring the concerns of the practitioners more directly into an initial relationship with NIE efforts. At the NEA we are beginning to gather data on the needs and concerns of teachers, students, and parents--input from the real world which might be of considerable value to NIE. Taken collectively as craftsmen, teachers represent a vast resource of information--much of it practical, "craft" information--about the learning process. From this stance, it

can be said that teachers know more about teaching than anyone. The suggestion was made that some organized effort should be made to identify "the great teacher craftsmen" and to somehow devise mechanisms to get at and replicate their craftsmanship. Ways must be found, we said, to get at and free-up teachers who all-too-often are prisoners in the classroom. Someone, incidentally, made the same point about teacher education staff members. It should not be beyond the social science ken of NIE and the NEA to get at this kind of an information reservoir and to make appropriate use of what it yields. As one of your associates said at the meeting: "How do we somehow orchestrate the research and development effort with the educational renewal effort (at the state and local levels) with the large formula grant program efforts, so that we get maximum impact."

Related to this was a suggestion that teacher involvement could be more readily achieved if it were made a part of OE research guidelines. This early involvement would certainly be much more desirable than bringing in teachers at a later point and saying "This is the change we're going to make. Never mind where it came from."

Teacher Participation in NIE

At one point in our discussion, we offered to provide you with a list of some 172 teachers who have been screened recently by either the teachers in their local areas or by their state associations for possible membership on our council for instruc-

tion. This is more than just a list of names, these people have been recognized by their peers as being particularly qualified in the area of instruction and instructional research needs. We are enclosing background information on each of these individuals--at what level they teach, what they do, minority group membership, etc.

Teachers selected from this list, or selected by some other screening procedure, might be used in a number of ways as a part of NIE, for they represent a great pool of expertise as well as a useful "pool of credibility" for dissemination purposes. As a matter of fact, such a teacher group might form a coterie to implement your "vouchers for teachers" concept. In addition to professional competence, such teachers would (and probably should) have leadership credibility within their state and local teacher associations. Keep in mind that the teachers of this country are now spending $150 million dollars a year of their own money for teacher association membership of one kind or another. And all indications are that they'd like to see more of this spent on the improvement of instruction.

Possible NEA-NIE Involvement

Here are briefly noted areas where, judging from our discussion, we seem to have common interests and where we may be able to formalize cooperative endeavors:

1. At various times during our day together the "agricultural model" for implementing change was put on the table in various contexts. Although we don't consider it a very good analogy--because of the different characteristics of the products involved--the fact remains that for many years the federal government has known far more about the pigs in this country than it has known about the school kids. And perhaps we can profit from knowing something about the farm lobby and how it has been able to perpetuate the USDA and its programs.

However, what we would like to suggest here is analogous to the county agent-county home demonstration agent aspects of the agri-model. Our thought is that together we might be able to build the necessary support for a new position in the school--a kind of instructional ombudsman. We probably wouldn't want to call him a director of research or a director of measurement (or accountability!), but he would be "a teacher's man" as opposed to the superintendent's man, the school board's man, or OE's man. And he would do much the kind of thing that was outlined for us at the meeting when we were told about the director of research who served 100 teachers in a climate described as "the healthiest experimental attitude I've ever seen."

Such persons, who might initially serve 100 teachers each in selected regions, would be carefully selected and given special preparation by both NEA and NIE. The initial training program might be jointly developed by both agencies, and actually administered by a third group. After the first period of training, these people would move into school districts, hopefully in most cases, districts from which they had come. More importantly, they would maintain a continuing and rather close relationship with both NEA and NIE--not only for their own in-service development, but equally important, as a source of feedback for the parent groups.

The K-12 building principals and other types of school supervisors seem to be in for hard times these days for their lack of attention to instruction, and it could well be that the presence of this instructional ombudsman in some school buildings would hasten the demise of at least the most deserving "Peter Principals."

2. The politically delicate but professionally sensible idea of a consumer service on instructional materials and equipment for teachers was mentioned briefly at the meeting. Here, it seems to us, is an area whose time has come--an area that neither of our agencies can continue to avoid much longer. The problem comes in two parts.

First is the enormous job of providing teachers with information (in an easily accessible and readily usable form) concerning what kinds of resources are available to accomplish a particular kind of learning. It is difficult enough to locate such resources in the commercial sector. There are, however, other large and relatively unexplored areas that should be searched and reported. For example, what kinds of appropriate instructional programs are available for the asking from federal agencies (DOD and Labor, for example) outside of OE? The same question must also be asked about such resources produced by non-government agencies under federal contract, again beyond OE.

So much for the first part. The present state of the art is such that teachers have every right to demand validation data for an increasing range of instructional resources. Is the stuff any good? And, can you prove it? Certainly the instructional programs at any future NEA Teacher Centers will be operated as close to a zero defects level as possible. And certainly we will share our "evaluation data" on the instructional quality of such materials with the teachers of America.

In both of these areas our two agencies, the NEA and NIE, will be working at the same time on the same problem; and at the very least we should make an effort to avoid duplication of effort and, if possible, to be mutually supportive.

3. For the past decade a virtual revolution in testing and measurement has more or less bypassed the NEA as well as OE. Much of this development has been either hidden or exploited by a commercial testing industry. It is almost an irony that Ralph Nader has decided to look into this, and thus fill (with a few graduate students) a vacuum created largely by a lack of attention from the two largest education agencies in the country, OE and the NEA. Both, incidentally, chartered by Congress to operate in the public interest.

As you may know, the NEA has recently taken steps to halt the use in schools of certain intelligence and achievement tests that discriminate on the basis of racial, cultural, and social factors. If the performance contract caper taught us anything, it was that we are doing a very bad job of measuring the effectiveness of our teaching.

Without going into detail here, we would like to suggest that we jointly call together an appropriate

group of testing experts and others familiar with some of the problems here in an effort to chart ways in which we might proceed jointly and/or separately to clear up the widespread confusion in this field and to measure more effectively what we are doing in the schools.

In conclusion we would like to mention three additional areas, discussed at our recent meeting, where there seemed to be considerable mutual interest and a great potential for future cooperative effort: early childhood education, an expanding national data base on teacher needs perceptions, and the NEA's unparalleled multi-media system for communication with teachers (all teachers) as well as with a wide range of other publics within the education community.

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